

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



**MEDIA LAUNCH OF THE RESPECT. NOW. ALWAYS NATIONAL
UNIVERSITY STUDENT SURVEY ON SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SEXUAL
HARRASSMENT**

23 AUGUST 2016

VC'S SPEAKING NOTES

Thank you, Professor Ian Jacobs, for welcoming us to your university on this important occasion.

I, too, pay my respects to the Bedegal people, the traditional owners of this land, and to your Elders, past and present.

I thank the Education Minister Simon Birmingham – who sends his regrets that he could not be here in person today – for his words of support and encouragement for this project.

And I welcome the Shadow Minister for Education and Shadow Minister for Women, Tanya Plibersek - thank you for being part of this launch today. At the outset, I want to thank the Australian Human Rights Commission for partnering with Universities Australia on this important project.

Each February, hundreds of thousands of new students arrive on university campuses like this one for the beginning of the academic year.

It's always a joy to see their optimism and excitement as they embark on their university studies. We never want to see that optimism shattered by sexual assault or sexual harassment.

They expect our universities to provide a first-class education. They expect us to provide a safe and secure environment to study in. Universities, like all institutions, are part of a wider community.

The challenge of sexual assault and sexual harassment exists in every part of Australian society.

Data from the ABS reminds us that almost **one in five** women in Australia have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime. Other data confirms that men, increasingly, and LGBTIQ Australians also experience sexual assault and sexual harassment.

We know that the damage caused by sexual assault and sexual harassment cannot be undone. It reverberates throughout a lifetime.

That is why today we are launching the first-ever national survey on university student experiences of sexual assault and sexual harassment as part of Universities Australia's Respect. Now. Always. campaign.

Until now, there has been no comprehensive national data on this important issue.

I believe that evidence should inform action, and that we have a profound leadership role to play in making our campuses safer.

Through this survey, we will be reaching out to students at all of Australia's universities to better understand the scale and nature of sexual assault and sexual harassment in our student communities.

Universities Australia has asked the Australian Human Rights Commission to conduct this survey and we are working with them to implement it.

Crucially, the project is supported by the National Union of Students and the National Tertiary Education Union.

The survey will have two parts.

The first is a national survey to provide quantitative data on the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in our student communities.

Importantly though, any university student, even if they are not selected in the survey's representative demographic sample, can share their experiences through an anonymous online submission to the Commission's [website](#).

Students' confidentiality will be protected at all times. No university will receive student responses and the Commission will hold all the data.

We know we cannot continue to improve how universities respond and support those students who need us most without hearing from the students themselves.

That is why it is so important to ask students to share their stories with us.

The survey is part of the broader Respect. Now. Always. campaign - a comprehensive initiative by Australian universities to prevent and address sexual assault and sexual harassment.

The survey, and the wider campaign, will ensure universities have the best data to keep guiding improvements in our prevention and support services.

Building on the work of dedicated people within universities and work by individual universities over many years, this campaign amplifies these efforts.

By working together, comprehensively, across the sector we keep shaping and sharing best practice across all universities.

In closing, I want to take this opportunity once again to thank all of the stakeholders, experts and partner organisations with whom we have worked on these initiatives.

I thank the Australian Human Rights Commission, the NTEU and the National Union of Students.

I thank the Commission President, Professor Gillian Triggs, and Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins, who have made this project a personal priority as our organisations worked together to develop it.

I thank Heidi La Paglia and Sinead Collee of NUS for your willingness to partner on this work on behalf of your student members across the country.

We are indebted, too, to the sexual violence prevention experts at both Our Watch and 1800 RESPECT, who have provided invaluable feedback and advice to Universities Australia on our Respect. Now. Always. campaign.

We have deep respect for the skill and expertise in your organisations. I am pleased that Our Watch CEO Mary Barry is with us today.

I thank Ian Darling of Shark Island Productions and the team at The Hunting Ground Australia Project – Allison Henry, Mary Macrae and Anna Kaplan – for working with Universities Australia over the past year. Thank you for initial seed funding for the survey and for the many campus screenings of the film.

I thank Professor Andrea Durbach and the Australian Human Rights Centre at UNSW, with this survey building on earlier work by them. And I thank Roy Morgan Research and staff at the Australian Bureau of Statistics for their expert input on the final survey design.

I also want to thank the former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick, who launched the first part of the campaign back in February for her encouragement of this initiative. She wanted to be here today but had a longstanding prior commitment on this date.

I thank Professor Ian Jacobs, as UA's lead Vice Chancellor on equity and diversity, and Professor Bruce Dowton, for their personal leadership from the earliest stages of this work. And I thank Professor Sandra Harding for her great skill, care and expert technical guidance to us about how to undertake a survey of this kind. Thank you all for your strong commitment to these issues. Indeed thank you to all Vice Chancellors across the country for your support of this work.

And finally, I want to thank the staff at Universities Australia for their work on this important project.

I conclude on this note.

Universities and Vice-Chancellors want our campuses and student communities to be places of safety and respect.
Now and always.

Today, once again, we say with one voice: one incident is one too many.

This project will no doubt be challenging. The data may well reveal the scope of further work for our institutions. And that is precisely why we need it.

I am delighted to join the other speakers as we launch it together. Thank you.